

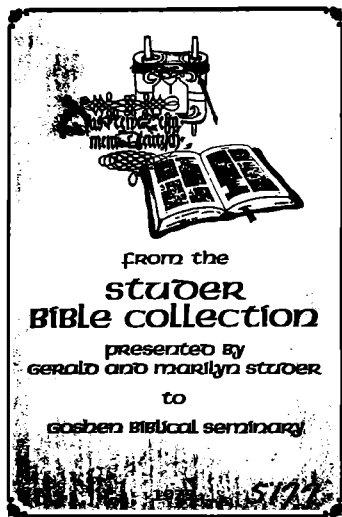
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THE PROPHETS' REPORT ON RELIGION IN NORTH AMERICA

Peter J. Ediger

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FOREWORD

The Old Testament prophets are among the most passionately alive and potently relevant writers of all time. Yet it took me many years and varied experiences to begin to get their message. A year's involvement with the Woodlawn Mennonite Church in Chicago's black South Side ghetto helped to open my eyes to some of the disturbing parallels between the religious, socioeconomic, and political practices to which the ancient prophets addressed themselves and those which exist in contemporary North America.

The Prophets' Report on Religion in North America is one attempt to let Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah, come to life in our day. I have tried to reflect something of their spirit and perspective and style in these free paraphrases of selected portions of their writings.

My hope is that this paraphrasing may contribute to the hearing of that Word of God which is "alive and active. It cuts more keenly than any two-edged sword . . . sifts the purposes and thoughts of the heart . . . everything lies naked and exposed to the eyes of the One with whom we have to reckon" (Heb. 4:12 NEB).

*Peter J. Ediger
Arvada, Colorado
November 1970*



AMOS

The words of Amos
which he saw concerning North America
in the days of Richard Nixon, President of the United States,
Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada.

And he said
The Lord roars from the city
and from the marketplace he utters his voice
so that the people in the suburbs shudder
and even the countryside trembles.

Thus says the Lord:
For three transgressions of China
and for four, I will not withhold the law of the harvest;
they shall reap what they have sown
because they crushed many people with ruthlessness
and closed themselves off from communication with the world
and sought to stamp out my name with atheistic indoctrination.
So I will send more purges upon the land
and bloody struggles between leaders of conflicting ideologies
and the people of China shall suffer many things,
says the Lord.

Thus says the Lord:
For three transgressions of Russia
and for four, I will not withhold the law of the harvest;
they shall reap what they have sown
because they carried into Siberian exile
many who were helpless
breaking up families and destroying villages
and severely limited free expression of views in conflict with the system.
So I will send leanness upon the land
and sadness upon the people,
says the Lord.

Thus says the Lord:
For three transgressions of France
and for four, I will not withhold the law of the harvest;
they shall reap what they have sown
because they were slow to give up exploitive colonial policies
in relationship to emerging nations
seeking to boast of a fading glory.
Therefore I will diminish their influence
and thwart their ambitions,
says the Lord.

Thus says the Lord:
For three transgressions of Germany
and for four, I will not withhold the law of the harvest;
they shall reap what they have sown
because they succumbed to strong demonic leadership
and failed to protest the inhumanity of baking human flesh in ovens
and snuffing out millions of lives in gaseous graves.
Therefore their land will be divided with a curtain
separating brother from brother and mother from daughter.

Thus says the Lord:
For three transgressions of America
and for four, I will not withhold the law of the harvest;
they shall reap what they have sown
because they did not rise up in protest
when their leaders pursued oppressive policies of power politics;
because they gave silent approval
to the raping plunder of a small people already pregnant with problems;
because they closed their eyes to the poverty of the poor
and turned aside from seeking justice for their brothers
to pursuing selfish gain for themselves;
because they glorified violence on their screens and in their books;
because they placed more value on their objects and their systems
than on their neighbors and their brothers;
because they pursued personal pleasure
above personal integrity and social sensitivity.

Now therefore hear this word which the Lord speaks against you, North America,
you who have been blessed of all the continents of the earth
with productivity and affluence
and with many churches and much religious activity.
I am holding you accountable
for what you do and what you fail to do.

Woe to those who lie on fancy beds
and stretch themselves on comfortable couches
and eat right foods from well-stocked supermarkets
who delight themselves with hi-fi stereo music
whose supply of wine is plentiful
and who wouldn't think of missing an appointment at the beauty parlor
but who are not concerned at the needs around them in the world
who do not see, and seeing not, care not
that their brothers are hungry for jobs and food and full humanity.

Woe to those who do not speak up in protest when their legislators
pile billion upon billions for military appropriations
and reject with a joke an appropriation of millions
to eradicate rats in a city slum
who do not know or do not care
that they spend more money in one month
blasting cannon fire into Vietnamese jungles
than it would cost in a year to exterminate the rats from their nation's slums.

Thus says the Lord:
I sent them messengers
but they would not hear.
I spoke and spoke and spoke
but they would not listen.
I sent them marchers
who walked and walked and walked and talked and talked and talked
but they paid no heed.

Therefore, thus says the Lord:
Fires will break out in your cities
and snipers will snipe from the rooftops
and looters will loot from your stores
and dynamite will blow up your buildings
and fear and confusion will reign in the streets,
because you did not hear the voice of the poor
and heeded not the marching feet of the oppressed
because you did not know that I was speaking through their voice
and walking in their shoes.



Because you repented not
but hardened your hearts in the days when I spoke,
therefore I will come with fire and with revolution
unless you turn and hear your brother's cry—and mine.

Hear this, you who trample upon the needy
and bring the poor of the land into ever greater economic captivity,
I will not forget any of your deeds.
Shall not the land tremble when the accounts are settled?

Hear this word, you high society girls
you who live in the country club hills
who oppress the weak and ignore the needy
who salve your consciences with lavish benefit parties
where you say to your domestics "Bring on the drinks."
Hear this you up-and-climbing middle-class men
You who say "if they only had my drive. . . ."
"I had to work for every penny I got. . . ."
"They could better themselves if they only tried. . . ."
Hear this you up-and-climbing middle-class men and high society girls
the time will come
when all you've accumulated will come to naught
and all the subtle legal ways
by which your prosperity came at their expense
will be exposed
and your hands will be empty of all save your guilt.

Woe to you who always want to be comfortable in church services
who want to be secure in your well-walled and carpeted religious systems
relying on the National Guard and massive military might
to protect you and your riches and your comfortable religion.

Woe to you who glibly say,
we want God's justice;
we want God's truth;
we want God's judgment.
Why should you desire the judgment of God?
It is piercing and not pleasant
as if a man fled from a lion
and a bear met him
or sought shelter in his house from the rain
and a tornado struck.
Is not the judgment of the Lord harsh, with no partiality?

Hear then the word of the Lord:
I'm sick and tired of many of your sacred rites.
I am not pleased by your pious poses and your religious rituals.
Even though you offer me your one-dollar bills and your five-dollar bills
or even your fat checks,
I will not accept them as an appeasement for your injustice.
I do not receive them as a cloak to cover the conscience pricks
or your insensitivity to the needs of your brother man.
But let me tell you what I will accept;
let me tell you what I am looking for.
Turn on the stream of justice and let it roll across the land;
open the irrigation valves of righteousness and let the refreshing waters
flood the parched earth of seven continents;
turn from the futile pouring of your manhood and your muscle and your money
into the outmoded demonic destruction of warfare
and channel the idealism and energy and compassion of your people
young and old into constructive works of righteousness and mercy.

Thus says the Lord:
Seek good and not evil, that you may live.
Hate evil and love good
and establish justice in your courts and in your legislative halls and in
your churches.

Hear and testify against the religious establishment,
says the Lord.
On the day that I punish America for her transgressions
I will surely chasten the structures of Christendom
and the beautiful sanctuaries shall fall to the ground
and the hollow sounds of your cathedrals shall be heard no more
and your altars shall rot in the rain.

Behold, the days are coming,
says the Lord,
when I will send a famine on the land,
neither a famine of bread nor a thirst for water
but of hearing of the word of the Lord.
In the mountainous haystack of religious words
they shall seek in vain for the needle of the Word of the Lord.

They shall wander from church to church
and from preacher to preacher
from counselor to counselor
from ism to ism
and from illusion to illusion;
they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord
but they shall not find it.
Because they did not listen when he spoke
they paid no heed when he addressed them;
they sat in affluent comfort on their ears
and would not hear.

A black and white photograph showing the back of a person with short, dark hair. They are wearing a dark-colored t-shirt. The back of the t-shirt features the text "FOR A BREATH OF FRESH AIR" in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters, arranged in four lines. The person is standing outdoors, and the background is slightly out of focus, showing what appears to be a brick wall and some foliage. To the right, the back of another person's head and shoulder are partially visible.

**FOR A
BREATH
OF
FRESH
AIR**



HOSEA

The Word of the Lord which came to Hosea of the Twentieth Century A.D.
son of Hosea of the Eighth Century B.C.
in the days of Nixon and Agnew, President and Vice President of the
United States
and Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada:

And the Lord said to Hosea,
Go get married to a prostitute and have children of prostitution
for the church commits great prostitution by forsaking the Lord.
So he went and got married to Mars, the daughter of Materialism
and she conceived and bore a son.

And the Lord said to him,
Call his name Pentagon
for yet a little while and I will punish Christendom
for the blood of the Pentagon.
And on that day I will blow up the bombs of Christendom
in the cities of North America.

And Mars conceived again and bore a daughter,
and the Lord said,
Call her name Merciless
for I will have no more mercy on Christendom.
But I will have mercy on a remnant of the faithful
and I will deliver them by the spirit of the Lord;
I will not deliver them by guns or by bombs or by missiles.

When Mars had weaned Merciless, she conceived again and bore a son,
and the Lord said,
Call his name Godless, for you are not my people and I am not your God.
For you have become sons of the gun and left being sons of the living God.

Plead with your mother, children, plead earnestly with your mother;
Plead that she cease her prostitution
lest I strip her naked and make her as nude as the day she was born.
For your mother has played the harlot.
She said,

I will seek all kinds of lovers
who will wine and dine me and deck me with diamonds and furs.
Therefore I will put out roadblocks for her and barricade her paths
so her messing around will come to an end,
and she will seek her lovers, but not find them;
she will call for them but they will not answer.
Then she will say,

I will go back to my husband and be better off than now.
And I will put an end to all her superficial celebrations;
her Christmases and Easters and Thanksgivings have become
religious rituals wrapped up in dollar signs.
So I will strip the land of its productivity
and her rivers and her air will be polluted
and she will say,

This is my reward which my lovers have given me.
And I will punish her for her worship of the gods of mammon and material
when she burned incense in the sacred halls of war and gross national product;
and she clothed herself with mighty missiles
and strung around her neck beads upon beads of bombs
and dangled from her ears cannisters of gas and barrels of napalm
as she went whoring after lying lovers
and forgot the Lord her God.

But in spite of this I will try to win her back
by speaking tenderly to her,
recalling the days when our love was young and full of hope.
And in that day, says the Lord,
you will call me “true love,” and I will no longer call you “lover of Mars,”
for I will remove the signs of militarism from among you
and together we will renew our covenant with creation
and the birds of the air and the beasts of the field shall join us
in breathing unpolluted air and walking uncontaminated soil.
And I will abolish the bomb and the gun and the missile from the land
and you will lie down in safety
and we will share our love in justice and in mercy and in peace
and you shall know the Lord.
And the Lord said to me,
 Go on, love a woman who is a prostitute and adulteress,
 even as the Lord loves the people called Christians
 though they turn to other gods and walk in other paths.
So I went to the whorehouse and paid five hundred dollars for her release
and I said to her,
 You belong to me now;
 cease your prostitution and your running after other gods.
Hear the word of the Lord, O Christians,
for the Lord has a bone to pick with you.
 Why is there no faithfulness and no knowledge of the Lord in the land?
 Why all the bribing, lying, killing, adultery, and exploitation?
 Your evil knows no limits; violence follows violence.
 Therefore your society is sick and your land is suffering.
 Your citizens are apprehensive
 and even the beasts of the littered fields
 and the birds of the smog-filled air
 and the fish of the polluted streams
 suffer the consequences.

Yet everyone goes on more or less as usual
with here and there a voice of protest, and here and there a politician's rhetoric.
But my real argument is with you, O Preacher,
You church leaders who blindly stumble around in broad daylight.
It is you and your congregations who are being destroyed.
My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge
because you preachers have rejected understanding.
I will reject you from being my spokesman
and my message will come from strange and unaccustomed sources.
For the more the churches prospered the more they sinned against me,
and the more they identified themselves with the status quo
the less they understood what the good news of my kingdom of love is all about.
They feed and feed and feed on the bread of religious nationalism;
They gorge themselves on the fat of religion-will-make-you-rich,
but they are not satisfied and their hunger remains
because they have forsaken the Lord to pursue their prostitution.
They sacrifice in beautiful cathedrals
and give their offerings regularly to the god of Mars,
increasing military appropriations
at the urgings of strong lobbyists
representing corporations whose military profits are profuse.
Therefore your young people protest and seek escape in drugs.
I will not punish your youth when they go astray
nor your sons and daughters in their adultery
for the adults themselves have turned from seeking life
and given themselves to false gods
and then wonder why ruin is enveloping the land.

Hear this, officials of the nations
and listen! Leaders of Christendom!
Open your ears, you in high places, for judgment is on you.
You who have passed sentence on others, you must now come under sentence.
Sound the sirens in Washington, and put out the alert in Ottawa.
North America is crumbling under judgment because she has pursued vain goals.
Therefore I am like a termite gnawing at her foundations, says the Lord,
and like a cancer eating away at her flesh.
When North America saw her sickness
and Christendom became aware of her wounds,
then they sought help from their RCMP and called out the National Guard
but they are not able to cure you; they cannot bring health to your wounds.
For I will be a panther to America, and like a young black panther to
Christendom,
until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face saying,
 Come let us return to the Lord
 for he has torn us, that he may heal us,
 he has stricken and he will bind us up.
 Let us seek the help of the Lord
 for his coming is as sure as the dawn, and as refreshing as the spring rain.



What shall I do with you, America?
What shall I do with you, Christendom?
Your love is as unpredictable as the morning clouds,
your love evaporates as quickly as the morning dew.
For I desire a steady love and not rhetoric and rituals;
I want knowledge of God more than a lot of ceremonies.
But in Chicago they steamrolled decision-making
and broke trust with youthful ideals;
our capital cities are full of corruption.
As thieves lie in wait for a man and the FLQ for public servants,
so the leaders are in collusion
to murder in the valleys of Vietnam and oppress in the slums of the cities.
I have seen a horrible thing in America!
Christendom's prostitution is exposed.
America is sick and instead of treating her sickness
she is binding herself with oppressive bandages,
bandages which will harden into the chains of a police state.
Thus says the Lord,
when I sought to restore the health of my people,
when I wanted to heal the wounds of the nation,
the corruption of the church became exposed along with spineless secularism,
for the Christians turned their backs on justice just as other men
and their preachers and evangelists together with the politicians
preach and pray and promise from many prestigious platforms
but do not see or do not say
that America is an adolescent senile
knowing not that her strength is sapped by prolonged injustice.

Woe to her for she has strayed from me!
Destruction to her for she has rebelled against me!
I would save her but she despises me.
Her prayers to me are not from the heart;
she makes all kinds of religious sounds.
as she grinds the poor within her boundaries and beyond into the dust
in her compulsive quest for bigger homes and newer cars, for snowmobiles
and finer clothes.
She embraces to her bosom all her mammon gods
knowing that she is holding faulty grenades
which any minute will explode in the hands of the holder.
Let out all the sirens!
for the cloud of death hangs over Christendom!
They have ignored my counsel and violated my love.
They cry to me,
 O God, we Americans are your people!
America has turned her back on the good.
She chose leaders but I was not consulted;
she elected legislators but I was not in the process.
She chose her leaders from the priests of her money-gods
and money-gods eventually kill their worshipers.
O you religious secularists,
I reject with passion your golden money calf!
When will you see that you can starve on gold?

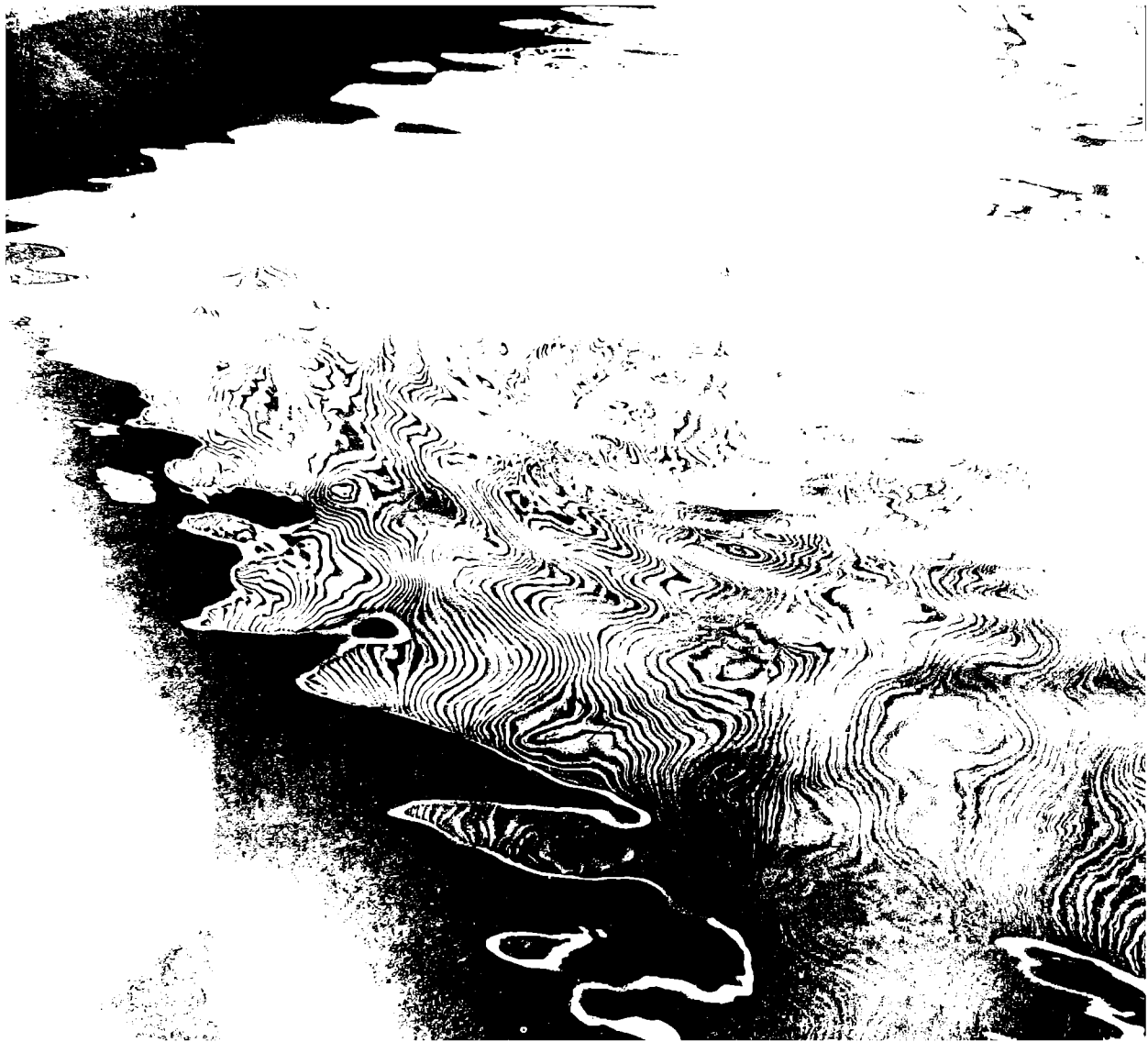
They have sown bombs; they will reap the super-bomb.
They bargain for alliances among the nations;
the enemies of one decade become the allies of the next
and the friends of one decade the fearful enemies of the following.
Christendom has erected sanctuary after sanctuary;
they have become centers of blasphemy;
they have become shallow seedbeds for lulling to sleep
the deathly silent majority.
They love religious ritual.
They bring their offerings and pray a blessing on them
but the Lord has no delight in them
for he remembers their silent approval of official exploitation and oppression.
They are returning to the mire of repression from which their forefathers fled.
For Christendom has forgotten the Lord and built prisons.
America has increased its dependence on armaments at home and abroad,
so I will send fires and dynamitings to her cities and her campuses
and there will be no security in her police.
Don't celebrate, America!
Don't display your military might in great parades
like nations under other forms of tyranny!
For you have played the harlot;
you have sold yourself to the Pentagon and you have picked up the tab!

All your military strategy and all your military might will fail you.
You are embracing the oppression from which you claim to liberate across the seas
and Adolf Hitler's words are haunting you:

“the great strength of our Fascist order lies in this:
that anyone who fights us, though he may win,
will nevertheless become like us.”

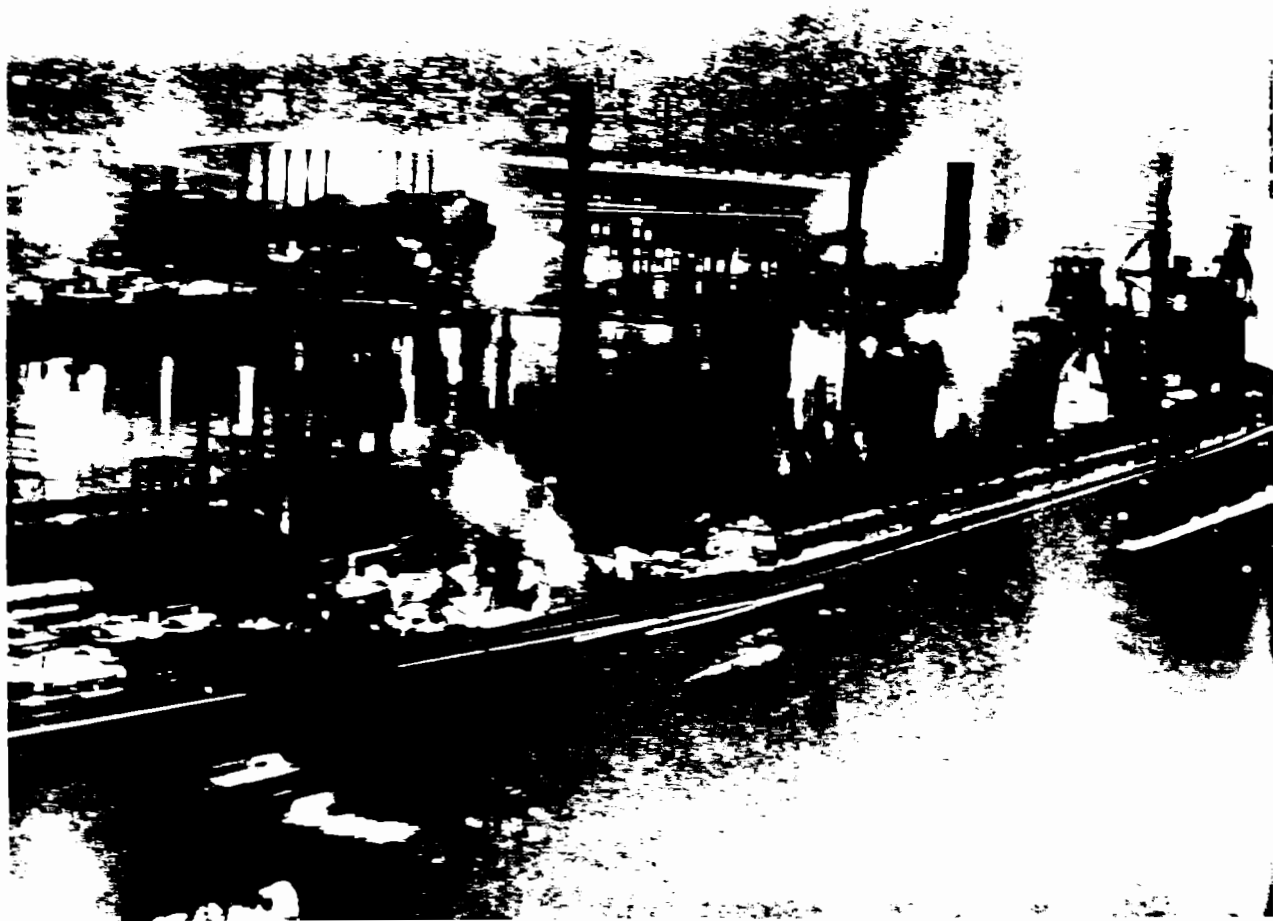
Your days of punishment, like Hitler's, shall come;
America, too, is under God's impartial judgment.
Do I hear someone say,

“That man is mad. That preacher is a crazy communist fool!”?
Because of your blind arrogance you cannot see that I am doing you a favor
by warning you to turn from your bad trip
and turn again to the Lord of compassion and mercy.
America's amber waves of grain have yielded abundant crops;
the more their fields produced the more churches they built.
As the economy went up so the sanctuaries went up.
But there's something rotten in that prosperity;
there is something hollow in that affluence
and churches along with other institutions will suffer when the scales of justice
are brought into balance.
In that day the Lord will break down the stony sanctuaries
and destroy the empty educational wings and fellowship halls
because their heart was not inclined toward truth and mercy.
And while their lips are saying,
“Lord, Lord! Lord, help us! Lord, save us!”



Their trust is not in me or in my spirit and their prayers are empty words.
They do not really seek my counsel in their plight;
they do not really want to walk my ways to peace.
And more and more are saying,
 Our leaders are not telling us the truth;
 our politicians utter endless words and empty phrases.
And so they seek salvation in their self-styled gods,
the gods of violence and dynamite, or the gods of law and order and repression;
the gods of dogmatic fundamentalism, or the gods of occult religiosity;
the gods of Birch, or the gods of Che and Mao;
the gods of getting high, or the gods of navel-gazing;
the gods of everybody-doing-his-own-thing,
or you-name-it-we've-got-the-kind-of-god-you-want.

O Christendom, you have made investments in gross injustice;
you are reaping dividends of smoldering hatreds.
You are eating the fruit of your insensitivity to the plight of your fellowman.
Because you trusted in your bank accounts and your bombers and your technology
therefore the turmoil of war and revolution shall arise;
within your own land and among your own people it shall come.
The weapons you have used so efficiently against your enemies will be turned on
you and your women and your children will die with your men.
When the Christian church was in her infancy, I loved her and she loved me.
I walked with her through the fires of persecution
and the more comfortable life became for her the more she left me
and kept going after money and prestige and military power.
Yet it was I who taught the Christian church to walk.
I took her by the hand in those troubled childhood years
but she did not know that it was I who gave her joy and comfort and security.
And now the Christians have forgotten me
and are bent on returning to the oppressive land of law and order,
the land of law without grace and the land of order without love.
They are building their own prisons with bars of fear and hate
and storing up guns in their suburban fortresses,
guns which will kill them in their streets
and bring chaos in their country.
How can I give you up, O Christians?
How can I bear to see you destroyed?
My stomach is tied up in knots,
my heart is breaking.
How can I express the heat of my anger toward you?
How can I tell you of the warmth and tenderness of my love for you?



For I am God and not man
and my purpose is creation, not destruction.
Christians are on a wild goose chase
pursuing empty pots of gold along rainbow boulevards.
They make shady deals with exploitive power structures;
they bargain with society and government for economic privilege;
their tax-exemption status warns them not to rock the boat.
They have become shrewd businessmen,
learning how to take advantage of all the legal loopholes
and becoming calloused to the oppression of the poor.
They have said,
 “By my hard work and diligence I have gained great wealth.”
But all their assets can never overcome all the liabilities incurred
in their shrewd maneuverings of economics.
I am the Lord your God by whose grace you prospered in the land.
I will make you poor again as in the days of old.
I tried to warn you through my prophets but you would not hear.
You have turned your back on me
and I will turn back onto you the groanings of your guilt.
Years ago when Christians spoke men listened with respect,
but now that Christians are worshiping the gods of power and possessions
their voice is dead.
And now they're piling one sin on another
making for themselves mighty military machines
and saying, save us, War Measures Act.
 “Save us, guns and bombs!
 Save us, mace and nightsticks!
 Save us, superior missiles and ssts!”
Therefore they shall be like a morning fog
or like dew when the sun comes out or like feathers blowing in the wind.

I am the Lord your God;
there is no security aside from me.
It was I who sustained you in your troubled times
but when you filled yourselves with food
and when your barns and houses were enlarged,
your hearts were hardened and you forgot me and lost a sense of who you are.
Therefore I will no longer be to you a tender shepherd;
I will be to you a lion lurking in the way and a panther leaping from his hiding
place.
I will rend you and devour you—then who will help you?
To whom will you turn in your distress?
Will your bulging bank accounts save you? .
Will your politicians defend you?
Will your guns and bombs and liberation fronts protect you then?
O Christians, your waywardness is getting unbearable!
You are like a stubborn child whose birth is overdue
but who refuses to move toward the opening of the womb,
who refuses to be born into new life
and thus you will be aborted, stillborn, dead.
Shall I save you from your suicidal path?
Shall I rescue you from death?
My mercy and compassion are exhausted
for I cannot save you if you will to die;
I cannot rescue you when death is your desire.
Return, O Christians, to the Lord your God
for the course you're on is leading to destruction.
Submit yourselves to radical open-heart surgery.

Say to your Lord,
 "Forgive our iniquity and restore what is good within us
 and we will give you more than lip loyalty.
 Alliances will not save us;
 we will not find meaning in missiles;
 we will cease seeking security in technology."
And then I will forgive their unfaithfulness
freely pouring out my love for them.
I will be as a mountain spring to them;
they shall blossom as the flowers of the field;
their roots shall go deep into the soil;
and their shoots reach out toward the sun;
they shall flourish as a garden.

O Christians recognize that it is I who truly loves you;
your zest for life has its source in me;
from me comes your fruitfulness and your creativity.
If you are wise, understand these things;
if you are discerning, know them.
For the genuine persons walk in the ways of the Lord;
but the hypocrites stumble around getting nowhere fast.



ISAIAH

The vision of Isaiah
the son of a WASP
which he saw concerning North America
in the days of Richard Nixon and Pierre Elliott Trudeau

Shout to high heaven!
Spread it over the earth!
For the Lord has spoken:

Sons have I reared and brought up,
but they have rebelled against me.
Dogs know their masters and horses their owners
but Christians don't know who they are;
my people are really mixed up.

Ah, sinful nation, a people full of iniquity!
Offspring of evildoers!
Sons who deal corruptly!
They have forsaken the Lord;
they have despised the One of whom they say, "In God We Trust";
they are at odds with the God of Justice and Truth.
Why do you pursue your suicidal ways?
You are sick through and through
from East to West and North to South.
Your country is in danger;
your cities burn with fires of hatred
and your campuses seethe with fermenting fires of frustrated dreams.
Hear the Word of the Lord, you rulers of the atom!
Give ear to the teachings of Jesus, you people of the bomb!

What do I care about your religious rituals?
I've had enough of your pious poses!
I can't stomach your solemn worship services in the face of your injustice!
When you spread forth your hands to pray I will hide my eyes from you!
Even though you make many prayers I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood!
Wash yourselves!
Get out the soap and water!
Let the soap of justice soak deep into your hard-skinned hearts!
Let the waters of righteousness pour over your corrupted institutions!
Cease to do evil! Learn to do good!
Seek justice! Correct oppression! -
Defend the fatherless! Plead for the widow and the ADC mother!
Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord.
Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow;
though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.
If you are willing to repent and change your ways,
you shall enjoy the good of the land.
But if you go on in your exploitation
you shall be demolished by your bombs or perish by your pollution,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.
How tragic! The cities once beautiful have become centers of injustice!
Cities with so much potential for human creativity
now are full of human misery and oppression.
Your officials are linked with crime;
everyone is looking for the bribe and the payoff.
They don't plead the cause of the poor and the powerless;
people in the ghetto get no hearing in the legislative halls.

Therefore the Lord says:
My anger will express itself;
I will turn the heat of my judgment on you to burn all your impurities.
Then I will restore trusted officials to lead you
and compassionate counselors to heal you
and your cities shall be called cities of Hope.
It shall come to pass in the future
that the mountain peaks of justice and of love
shall again be seen rising from the churches,
rising up above the swamps of bigotry and bigness of the cold cathedrals.
And peoples of the world will look to the church with hope and trust
and not despair and fear.
And many people will come and say
 "Come let us go to the mountain of the Lord;
 to the mountain peaks of justice and of love;
 that we may learn the ways of the Lord and walk the paths of the Lord."
For out of the church shall come moral and ethical leadership
and the word of the Lord shall again be heard in the land.
His spirit shall reconcile the nations
and his values shall be the people's values;
and they shall melt their bombs into butter
and their armaments into agriculture;
nation shall not threaten war against nation
and military spending and military strategy will be obsolete.
O Christians, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord.
But now they have rejected my ways, says the Lord.

They are following myths and old men's tales,
myths of national and cultural and racial superiority
and old men's tales of the glory and the glamour of the military.
They have filled their land with product after product after product;
there is no end to their passion for consuming and possessing.
Their land is loaded with missiles and their mountains mined with arsenals.
They worship at the feet of Dow Jones and GNP.
And they haven't really heard that their land is dying ecologically;
they know not that their soul is shriveled in their bloated bodies.
Hide underground!
Seek shelter from the smog and strontium 90!
Free from the ecological judgment!
Man's proud and haughty exploitation of creation
shall be brought into the cosmic courtroom;
for the creative forces have a way of bringing into balance
those of life's elements which prostitute the environment.
And you, Western Man,
you are balanced in the scale and found wanting;
wanting more and more and taking more and more and using more and more
and exploiting more and more and oppressing more and more and junking
more and more;
and all for the sake of your mammoth mammon gods
gods for which you sacrifice the lifeblood of your youth
and the life resources of your land.
But all those idols fabricated from your fears will fail you;
no banks can guarantee you solvency of spirit;
no RCMP or CIA or FBI or National Guard or Pentagon
or any instant institutionalized suppression of dissenters
can provide security for a society on the suicidal path of benign neglect
of its massive cancerous sores of racism and war and poverty.



And when those idols fabricated from your fears are exposed
as fraudulent and futile
then you will flee to the hills and seek refuge in the desert
from before the awesome judgment of creation.
For behold, the Lord of history is moving in your day
bringing revolution to your land;
and anarchy is coming to your cities
and your officials and policemen and your judges and your preachers
and your sociologists and psychiatrists
will be subjected to the scorn and ridicule of youthful rebels.
For Christendom has stumbled into pits of oppression
and churches have fallen into swamps of status quoism
and thus have brought destruction on themselves!
The Lord has taken his place in the judge's seat
and called as defendants the so-called leaders of society—
corporation managers and politicians
shrewd businessmen and polished preachers.
It is you who have stripped the land of humaneness;
the plunder of the poor built up your countryside estates;
the raping plunder of the poor pays for your country club affairs!
How can you go on crushing my people
and grinding the face of the poor in the dust of your dastardly deeds?
Thus says the Lord:
You haughty mink-stoled churchwomen
who parade with proud necks and powdered noses
and glance wantonly with green-shadowed eyes
craving for attention to the finery and furs
covering the paleness of your bodies and the deadness of your spirit.

Thus says the Lord:

I will smite you with scars all over your bountiful bodies
and strip from you all the layers of artificiality and superficiality
and the barrenness of your spirit will be exposed for all to see.

In that day I will take away the jewelry
of your ears and your hands and your necks;
and the smell of your perfume
and the lounging robes and suits
and the minis and the maxis and the midis
and the powders and the creams
and the weekly visit to the dresser of your hair.

Instead of perfume you shall have the smell of rotting bodies
and instead of girdles, chains will hold you in
and instead of well-set hair, shaved heads will be your lot
and instead of nice robes, prisoner garb with stripes and numbers
and instead of beauty, shame.

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In the twenty-fifth year of the atomic age
when air and water pollution was continuing
and oppression of the black and brown and poor went on unchecked
and the Indo-China war refused to die,
I went to church to meditate.

And as I reflected on the life within me and around me in the world
the presence of the Lord was very real and filled my being
and enveloped the whole church and the earth and the universe.



And from everywhere I heard the voices of creation saying
Holy holy holy is the Lord of Life;
the whole earth is full of his glory!
And I trembled as I reflected on the message of creation;
I was overwhelmed! And I said,
 "Woe is me, for I am lost!
 I am a man of unclean lips and bloody hands and polluting habits!
 And I live in the midst of a people of bloody hands and unclean lips
 and polluting habits!
 For my eyes have seen the Lord, the Creator of Life!"
Then the reality of the amazing love of God filled my being.
And the voice of the Lord said to me,
 You have been touched by my love;
 Your guilt is gone, your sin forgiven.
And the voice of the Lord said,
 Whom shall I send?
 Who will go with the good news of life and love?
And I said,
 I'll go! Send me!
And he said,
 Go and say to the people:
 Hear and hear, but do not understand;
 see and see, but do not perceive.
 Make the heart of this people fat,
 and their ears heavy,
 and shut their eyes;
 lest they see with their eyes
 and hear with their ears
 and understand with their hearts
 and turn and be healed.

Then I said,

How long, Lord? How long will this go on?

And he said,

Till cities lie waste without inhabitant

and houses without men

and the land is utterly desolate

and the people scattered far away

scattered with many lonely memories and many fading dreams.

And though here and there pockets of residents remain

they will be like branchless tree trunks after a forest fire.

.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me!

He has commissioned me to bring good news to the underprivileged;

he has sent me to minister to the discouraged and brokenhearted;

to proclaim liberty to the captives

and release from prison for all behind bars;

to proclaim an age of blessing from the Lord for those who were oppressed;

a day when tables will be turned and those who mourned shall find their comfort.

Instead of weeds and ashes flowers shall bloom;

instead of tears and fruitless toil glad celebrations;

lust songs of praise instead of fainting spirits;

and you will be called pillars of righteousness,

fruitful branches in the vineyard of the Lord.

Ancient ruins will be raised again;

devastated cities shall rise up anew.

And the Chinese and the Russians will live side by side with you;

and you will share with joy in the resources of the earth.

For I the Lord love justice;

I hate all forms of exploitation

and recompense shall surely come to all who practice wrong.

And I will have a trust relationship with those who seek the right;
their children and their children's children
shall be recognized among the nations
as people of light and compassion.
Let us rejoice in the Lord!
Let us sing praises to God!
He has given us joy in life!
He has opened the windows of love
like a bridegroom receiving his bride
and a bride receiving her lover.
For as the earth is pregnant with life
and as a garden produces its fruit,
so the Lord will raise righteousness and joy in the soil of the nations.



MICAH

The word of the Lord which came to Micah of Middletown
which he saw concerning Western civilization in general and North America
in particular
in the days when winds of revolution rushed around the world.

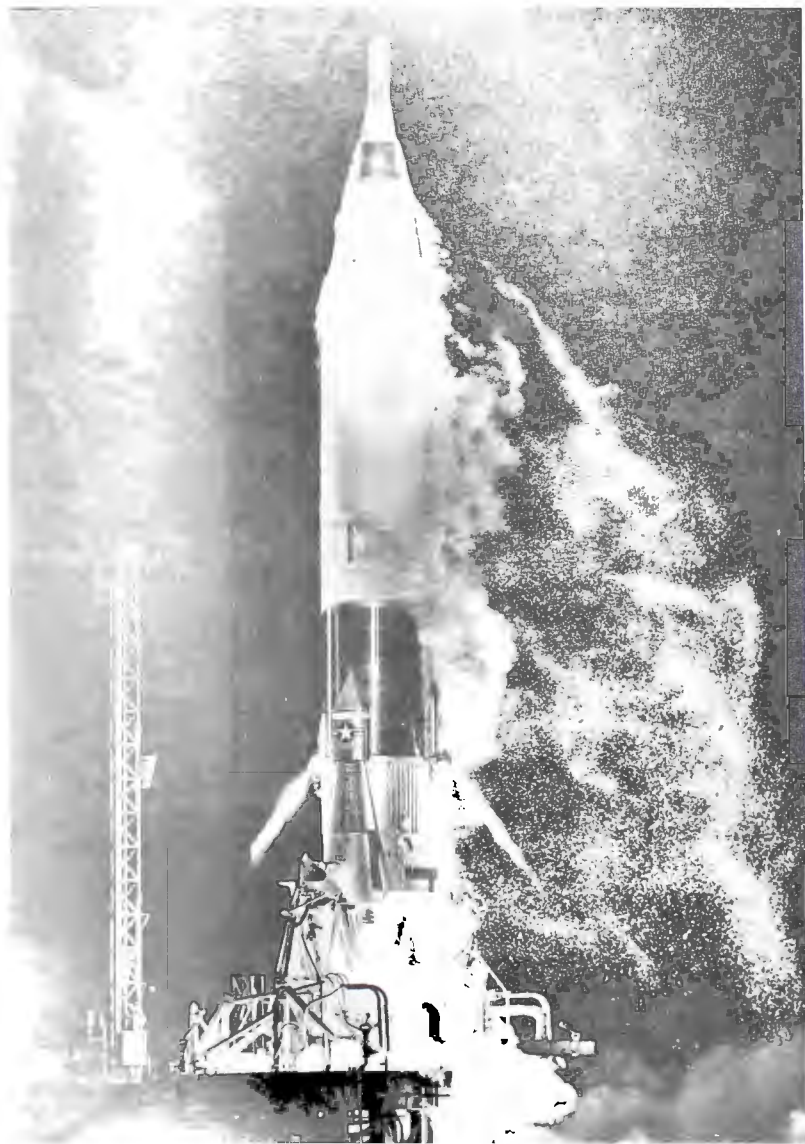
Hear, you people, all of you!
Listen, inhabitants of earth!
Let the Lord present his case against you,
the Lord who transcends history but who also lives and moves in history.
For the Lord is moving in your history; he is happening in your events.
Like a giant bulldozer he is leveling the mountains of your injustice
and filling the valleys of your oppression.
He comes like fire melting wax and like water rushing over a cliff.
He comes in judgment on the sins of Christendom;
he comes to judge the violence of churches
which have turned their backs on the Son of Man
and turned their faces to the rich
with smooth men making images for money.
What is the sin of Christendom?
Is it not reflected in your ecclesiastical and national priorities?
What is the violence of the churches?
Is it not apparent in the ghettos of your cities and in bleeding lands around the
world?

Therefore, says the Lord,
I will make your cities a pile of rubble, a junk heap for dumping refuse;
I will blow up your great halls and universities
and shake them to their foundations.
All your historic shrines shall be shattered
and all your sacred buildings burned with fire.
For from the oppression of poor people they were built;
and the oppressed poor people will destroy them.
For this reason I am sick and I weep;
For this reason I cry like a mourning dove, and howl like a lonely coyote.
For our wounds are incurable, our sickness is the sickness of death.
That which could never happen to us is at our gate;
that which was impossible is knocking at our door.
Listen! All you New Yorkers! You who are too hard to cry!
Look! You in California's City of the Angels! Wipe the smog from your eyes and
weep!
Stop! You who live in the Hollywood hills and walk in your violent naked ways
and fly to your sunbaked sin-simmered sand resorts!
Stop! Look! Listen!

The groanings and explosions of Chicago and Montreal of Jackson and Kent
State
must jar you out of your complacency in time!
And you who live in quiet rural towns
and you who think yourself secure in suburban Sunshine Lanes,
trouble is approaching your peaceful plastic palaces
and bubbles of benign neglect are bursting in your ears!

And you who live in Washington! You who have appropriated multi-millions
for rockets and for missiles—how will you escape the consequences
of the profoundly mixed-up priorities of your policies?
Will you shoot yourself into outer space?
Will you blast yourself to Mars, the god of war,
whom you have worshiped with such deadly dedication?
Put on your mourning clothes, dress only in black.
Cry for your children, cry for the children you've laughed with
for they shall be taken from you,
taken to war and to jail and across your northern border.
Woe to those who scheme up evil plots, who dream of shady deals in their beds!
Then when morning comes they implement their schemes
using all the resources at their command.
They want a certain property and they get it by fair means or foul;
they take houses from the poor;
they oppress a man and his family and take him for everything he has.
Therefore, thus says the Lord,
Behold, upon this people I am bringing judgment,
judgment from which there is no escape;
and your pride and your haughtiness will go down the drain,
down the drain with the American dream you turned into a nightmare.
In that day you will sing a sad song,
a song of deep hurt and dark despair,
 We are ruined, utterly ruined.
 How can God do this to us?
 Our fields, our houses, and our factories
 are divided by our revolutionary captors.
 How in the world could this happen?
Then all your paper deeds duly registered in the county courthouse
will be worthless
and you will have no voice in the decisions of your destiny.

“Don’t preach that stuff;” so they say to me.
“Don’t preach those pessimistic words;
such disgraceful calamity will never come to us!”
O really?
Should what I say not be said?
Is the Lord’s Spirit to be restricted?
Are we blaming God for our misdeeds?
If we are indeed dealing justly, should any message be a threat to us?
But you, you have become the enemy of the people.
You strip clothes from the peaceful people—red and brown and black and white;
you evict women with children from their homes;
you go right on marching the road to destruction
marching roughshod over those who lack the power to protest.
If a man would come to you with smooth oratory and a bag of lies
saying, “Everything is going well; we’re prospering; honor America!”
he would be the kind of preacher you would really go for.
Hear, all you church leaders!
And all you legislators, listen!
Aren’t you the ones who are supposed to work for justice?
You who hate good and love evil!
You who fleece my people with your policies!
You who crush the spirits of my people and break their bodies!
You who live in luxury while lambasting those on welfare!
You who strip the poor of life and hope, who cut them up in pieces
like a butcher chopping meat!
You’re going to cry to high heaven when the judgment comes,
but there will be no answer.
The Lord of heaven will hide his face from you
because you turned not from your evil deeds.



Thus says the Lord concerning the preachers who led my people astray,
who cry “peace” and “law and order”
with their bloated bellies and their padded bank accounts
and who are quick to support suppression and violence
against the oppressed who are rising up against hunger and joblessness.
Therefore, says the Lord, night is coming, night without insight;
darkness is coming, darkness without divine light.
The halo will fade from the preacher
and all the false prophets will be disgraced.
But I will seek the Spirit of the Lord
and with power and with courage declare to Christendom its injustice
and with a pleading love point out to the church its sin.
Hear this, you members of church councils and synods and presbyteries
and you legislators in the land of America;
you who mock justice with empty words and pervert equity with redundant
rhetoric;
who build cities with blood and suburbs with corruption;
your officials decide for the bribe;
your preachers preach what they’re paid to preach;
your evangelists do what brings in the money;
yet they use all the religious language of “trust in the Lord”
saying, “Is not the Lord with us? Has he not prospered us?
Surely no evil will come upon us.”

Listen to what the Lord has to say!
Stand up, Christian!
Stand up and state your case!
State your case before the mountains and let the hills hear your voice!
Listen, you mountains!
Listen to my case against the people!
Listen, earth! You be the judge and jury!

I have a complaint against my people.
What in the world have I done to you, Christians?
How have I failed you?
Answer me!
For I have brought you from many adverse conditions;
I have walked with you when you were victims of persecution and oppression.
Can you so soon forget my saving acts?
Why do you now inflict on others that oppression you once knew so well?
And do I hear you saying,
 “What does God expect of me anyway? What does he want?
 Am I supposed to go to church every Sunday morning
 and Sunday night and Wednesday night?
 And will the Lord be pleased with big offerings
 of hundreds of thousands of dollars?
 Shall I sacrifice my family and friends and give all my time to the church?”
Come off it, Man! You know better than that!
You know what is good!
And what does God ask of you
but to do justice
and love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God?

The voice of the Lord cries to the city.
Listen, you officials and citizens of the city!
Can I forget the injustice piled up in your ghettos?
Can I forget your jacked-up prices and your loan sharks?
Your rich men are full of violence,
the violence of callous inhumanity,
their sharp lawyers and bribed officials
protect the interests of the rich at the expense of the poor.
Therefore judgment is already on the way.
Though you accumulate more and more you are less and less secure.



Hunger for some meaning in your life gnaws away at your guts;
and the sounds of revolution are at your bank's door
and dynamite destroys your delusive dreams of more and more profits for less and
less people.

For you have worshiped the gods of Mammon above the God of Mercy;
you have heeded the counsels of capitalism above the Word of the Lord.

Woe is me!

I feel like a tree stripped of all fruit
and like a dried-up spring.

There are no good men left on the earth;
everyone is out to get his fellowman.

It's every man for himself and the devil get the hindmost.

Officials at all levels deal in bribes and graft;
the best of them get tainted by the system.

Don't trust anybody; suspect your best friend; be careful what you say to your
wife.

The son treats the father with contempt; the daughter rebels against her mother;
and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

A man's enemies live under his own roof.

Yet I will look to the Lord for help;
the God of my salvation will hear me.

Don't gloat over my misfortune—you who have the upper hand now;
that which falls will rise again.

In my darkness the Lord is light to me.

I will endure the anger of the Lord for I have sinned against him;

I will endure until he pleads my case and brings judgment on my oppressors.

I have a dream!¹

I have a dream of the restructuring of our society!

I have a dream of people building on the power of love which casts out fear;

1. Many of the thoughts in this concluding section are adapted from speeches by Martin Luther King, Jr.

I have a dream of people building on the trust and faith which breaks down barriers;
I have a dream of people building on the hope which keeps faith and love alive in a day when prejudice and fear threaten the life of our land and our world.
I have a dream of sons of ghetto-dwellers and sons of suburbanites sitting down together at the table of brotherhood, sharing together in the fruit of common effort and singing songs of praise to the God of all.
I have a dream of a day when little children and their fathers and their mothers will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character; when personal values will be more important than property values; when we shall see our brother's good as our own, and feel our brother's pain as our own; and we shall truly love our neighbor as ourselves.
I have a dream of nonviolence;
of a society in which vengeance and retaliation are taboo;
of a country which will not be ruled by bullets and by dynamite at home and which will not seek to rule by bullets and by bombs abroad;
of a nation which will lead the nations of the world in turning swords into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks and bombs and bombers into bread and butter.
I have a dream of that mountaintop from which we may view the promised land where valleys are exalted and mountains made low and crooked places straight.
I have a dream of a growing crescendo of voices rising out of the shame and hurt and anger of our guilt and pain and passion and singing old words with new spirit
"We Shall Overcome . . . Someday!"

